



Habitat is where it's at!

May 2016



We hope you enjoy reading about the adventures of the **Green River Region** personnel as they work to *Conserve Wildlife and Serve People!*



Special dates and points of interest:

- **MAY 17**, GREEN RIVER GAME AND FISH OFFICE, 7 P.M., PUBLIC MEETING TO DISCUSS MOUNTAIN LION, DISABLED HUNTER, DOMESTIC/BIGHORN SHEEP PLAN AND NONGAME REGULATIONS
- **MAY 21**, DEER MORTALITY SURVEYS, COKEVILLE/SAGE JUNCTION, GRAVEL PIT 3 MILES SOUTH OF HIGHWAYS 30 AND 89; 9 AM; DRESS FOR WEATHER; BRING WATER/FOOD
- **MAY 21**, OPEN HOUSE FOR HUNTER EDUCATION INSTRUCTORS NEW AND ALREADY TEACHING; GREEN RIVER GAME AND FISH OFFICE , 2 PM
- DEADLINE TO APPLY FOR BIG GAME LICENSES IS **MAY 31**.
- REMEMBER: YOU CAN BUY ALL YOUR HUNTING LICENSES, REQUIRED STAMPS AND MANY MORE PRODUCTS AT THE WGFD WEBSITE FROM THE COMFORT OF YOUR OWN COMPUTER!

Baggs Game Warden Kim Olson photographed this male sharp-tailed grouse dancing to attract his mate. (left, center) Sage grouse wrap up their spring lek activity in mid-May. *(Photo left, bottom by Green River Game Warden Andy Roosa)* Regional staff look forward to their first sighting of a deer or pronghorn fawn. **Green River Wildlife Biologist Patrick Burke** took the above deer fawn photo in 2014 with a zoom lens. Spring is here and birds are some of the most visual symbols that winter is on the way out; and not a minute too soon!

~ Stop Poaching efforts ~ Region game wardens weigh-in on illegal shed antler collection~



Evanston Game Warden Nick Roberts

Warden Roberts spent considerable time enforcing Wyoming's shed antler collection regulation. He issued 10 citations and two warnings for violating the regulation and seized approximately 35 antlers. Seven of the 12 violations were committed by Utah antler hunters. (photos above)



Photos:
Kemmerer Game Warden Chris Baird; view of suspect collecting shed antlers before May 1 through spotting scope (top) and the shed antlers Baird seized. (left)

Game wardens weigh-in on antler collection and winter range violations in southwest Wyoming

Game wardens in the Green River Region of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department report their law enforcement efforts to monitor the illegal collection of shed antlers and horns and enforce winter range closures yielded a "mixed bag" of results around southwest Wyoming.

"We continue to monitor the illegal collection of shed antlers and horns west of the Continental Divide and individuals entering into areas closed to protect wintering big game," said Green River Region Wildlife Supervisor Steve DeCecco. "We are committed to monitoring compliance, educating the public, and detecting violations of the shed antler gathering regulation throughout the region. The numbers of citations and warnings were up from the spring of 2015 in some of the districts in the region. Other districts, like Rock Springs, only had one citation issued. It was really a mixed bag of results."

Warden districts in the Green River region include Baggs, Rock Springs, Green River, Mountain View, Evanston, Cokeville, and Kemmerer. Game wardens in the region reported a total of three warnings for illegal shed antler or horn collection, 18 citations for illegal collection of shed antlers or horns, ten violations for winter range closures, four citations for illegal camping on state lands, and two citations written for violation of the Interstate Game Tag regulation. There are also cases still pending in some warden districts.

The shed antler regulation was authorized by the Wyoming Legislature and adopted by the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission in 2009 to minimize the increasing disturbance to big game on winter and spring ranges by antler hunters. The regulation prohibits the "collecting" of antlers from January 1 through April 30 on public land west of the continental divide in Wyoming. The definition of "collecting" antlers includes attempting to locate, search for, stockpile, or possess shed antlers during the closed season. A violation of this regulation carries the same potential penalties as many other hunting violations. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has many winter range closures in southwest Wyoming and Game and Fish game wardens assist with the protection of these closed winter ranges. (continued next page)

~ Stop Poaching efforts ~ Region game wardens weigh-in on illegal shed antler collection~

"I spent considerable time in April enforcing Wyoming's shed antler collection regulation," said Evanston Game Warden Nick Roberts. "I issued 10 citations and two warnings for violating the regulation and seized approximately 35 antlers. Seven of the 12 violations were committed by Utah shed antler hunters. **Shed antler hunters** out on May 1st reported high numbers of winter-killed deer, especially in the Leroy area, where we had poor compliance with the shed antler collection regulation. At least in the Evanston area, we lost a lot of fawns."

"While enforcing shed antler and winter range laws in the area around Cokeville, I saw generally good compliance prior to the May 1st opening day for shed antler seasons and vehicle use on BLM restricted winter ranges," said Cokeville Game Warden Neil Hymas. "Shed antlers that were being observed by wildlife officers in the Cokeville area produced few indications of violations. Legal sportsmen were again very helpful in making the shed antler hunting and winter range closure regulations effective. We continue to make contacts with both residents and non-residents who said they did not know that Wyoming had a shed antler season. Education continues to be important in keeping good compliance with the regulations."

"We definitely have folks out hunting on private lands knowing they are not violating the antler regulation, but are criminally trespassing without the landowner's permission to do so," said Andy Countryman, Game and Fish Access Yes Coordinator in southwest Wyoming. "While assisting Kemmerer Game Warden Chris Baird I contacted several folks who were just "looking around". In addition, I contacted a large group of Utah folks who were putting in a camp along highway 189 near I-80. They had at least three vehicles, four horses, and were planning on camping and hunting antlers for 9 consecutive days. The influx of large out-of- state groups coming to the area to hunt for shed antlers is growing exponentially."

"Weather this year seemed to assist in the delay of shed antler hunting, as continued muddy and snowy conditions kept a lot of folks off of the roads," said Baggs Game Warden Kim Olson. "In fact, winter ranges were still being used by large numbers of wintering deer up until the opening day of the shed antler season. This, really, is the reason why the shed antler season exists. This fact is so easily forgotten. It is not just so folks can't pick up antler sheds; the season exists because big game animals, like deer, need that time to be undisturbed by hordes of people, while they are still on winter range. This was very evident in the Baggs area this year."

"We truly commend the shed antler enthusiasts who obey the regulation and wait until May 1 before venturing onto winter ranges to look for antlers," DeCecco said. "We will continue to devote the time and effort it takes to protect wintering wildlife. We hope all wildlife observers will continue to minimize activity around big game animals during the winter and early spring periods."

Anyone with information on a wildlife violation can call their local game warden or the STOP Poaching Hotline at 1-877-WGFD-TIP. Violations may also be reported online at the Game and Fish website <http://wgfd.wyo.gov>

Enforcement Happenings

There are unsolved poaching cases in the Green River Region. If you have any information about any wildlife violation please contact your local game warden or the **STOP Poaching Hotline** at:

1-877-WGFD-TIP (1-877-943-3847)

- You can also report a wildlife violation at the WGFD website

<http://wgfd.wyo.gov>



~ Collecting shed antlers the illegal way and the legal-FUN- way~



Photos: Kemmerer Game Warden Chris Baird

Game Warden Baird was able to capture this person illegally collecting a shed antler using a trail camera. **(top, left)** Baird and fellow Big Piney Game Warden Adam Hymas also cited a group of illegal shed antler hunters from Utah. **(center, left)** It is illegal to pick up any shed antlers or horns west of the Continental Divide January 1 through April 30 of each year.



Cokeville Game Warden Neil Hymas submitted these photos of Clint Wolfe and his son, Taylor Wolfe, from Springville, Utah with an elk antler. The father-son team assisted Warden Hymas in removing an antler when the shed antler season opened. **(center, immediate left)**

TJ Feller, from Cokeville, found an adult mule deer that died from natural causes. TJ followed proper protocol by immediately calling Cokeville Game Warden Neil Hymas and making arrangements to purchase an Interstate Game Tag for the head. **(photo below, left)**



Speas Hatchery personnel busy stocking fish with "Cutty and Bow" ~ Aquatic Invasive Species



Photos, left, top to bottom:
Fish stocking trucks Bow and Cutty;
rainbow trout coming out the tube;
Lars Alsager from Speas Hatchery and
Pete Starr from Speas Hatchery.

Fish populations in Flaming Gorge Reservoir are getting a boost this month. Speas Hatchery personnel Lars Alsager and Pete Starr delivered and stocked nearly 35,000 Eagle Lake rainbow trout into the Gorge on May 9. The fish arrived in two new supped-up stocking trucks named "Cutty" and "Bow". The tanks and truck are equipped with on-board oxygen and water temperature gauges, so the fish arrive in good shape and ready for a new life in the Gorge. Green River Fisheries Supervisor Robert Keith says he plans for fish stocking resources in southwest waters two years in advance. 600,000 trout and 1.5 million kokanee salmon will be stocked in the Gorge in May. You can follow "Cutty" and "Bow" on Twitter at #wyocutty or #Wyobow.

Southwest Wyoming Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator Wes Gordon conducted public AIS trainings for people who want to become watercraft inspectors. Gordon and his crew are conducting watercraft inspections through November at ports of entry and boat ramps on the Gorge and on area reservoirs, in an effort to keep invasive species, like zebra and quagga mussels, out of Wyoming's waters. In 2013, Wyoming instituted a mandatory watercraft inspection law, which requires that all watercraft being transported by land into Wyoming from out of state must have an inspection prior to launching on any waters.



GR Fisheries Supervisor Robb Keith (right) helps Lars Alsager (left) fit the fish stocking tube into place.



GR AIS personnel Bev Bobbitt (left) and Wes Gordon (right) conduct a AIS watercraft inspection training.

AIS worker Jessica Chadwick assists Gordon with conducting a public AIS training. (photos to the left)



~Cleaning up illegal dump sites on HMA's ~ Another aggressive moose~ Project WILD Education



Evanston Game Warden Nick Roberts removed litter and illegal trash dumps on Hunter Management and Habitat Management Areas . (photo top, left)

Kemmerer Game Warden Chris Baird, Mountain View Game Warden Allen Deru, Evanston Game Warden Nick Roberts and Green River Game Warden Rob Shipe tranquilized and relocated an aggressive moose from Kemmerer. (photo, center, left)



Early Educators took part in a Project WILD and Project Learning Tree workshop in late April. Green River Information and Education Specialist Lucy Wold conducted the workshop, along with Cokeville Meadows Wildlife Refuge Manager Katie Theule and Alcova School Teacher Hazel Scharosch. Workshop participants receive two conservation education curriculum guides, music CD from Billy B, and credit towards Professional Teaching Standards Board and STARS for professional development and recertification.



Amy Calhoun dissects an owl pellet. (above)



Workshop participants simulate a mule deer migration in the WILD activity "Oh Deer!" (left)



Students and staff from the Green River Child Development Center getting WILD with Lunch for a Bear at the GR office. (left)

~ Fisheries Habitat "Facelift" for the Lower Big Sandy River ~



Aquatic Habitat Biologist Kevin Spence



Volunteer Pat Newell

Figure 1. Comparison photos of the same location immediately upstream of a sill structure during 2000 (left) and again in 2011 (right) showing riparian vegetation stabilizing a streambank and narrowing and deepening the river channel to improve habitat.



Figure 2

*Fisheries Habitat "Facelift" for the Lower Big Sandy River,
Green River Aquatic Habitat Biologist Kevin Spence*

During the early 1990s, the Flaming Gorge/Lower Green River Chapter of Trout Unlimited partnered with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department to construct several in-stream rock structures or "sills" in the Big Sandy River between Bone Draw and the Big Bend area. The original purpose of each structure was to enhance river aquatic and riparian habitats, and thereby improve the fisheries potential. Each sill served to elevate water tables and improve riparian vegetation to stabilize streambanks and thereby narrow and deepen the river channel (Figure 1), scour deep pools with cooler water to hold trout, and encourage exposed gravel substrate to increase aquatic insect production for trout food.

A survey was conducted in 2012 to evaluate 48 of existing sill structures to determine whether or not each structure required maintenance work or reconstruction in order to continue to function as originally intended. During May of 2015, Game and Fish utilized funds granted by the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resources Trust Board and collaborated with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Seedskadee National Wildlife Refuge employees to maintain 19 of the Big Sandy's in-stream rock sill structures located on state lands.

These sills were in need of various levels of maintenance work for them to function properly, remain hydrologically sound, and continue to provide fish habitat. Additional angular rock was added and/or used to reconfigure each structure to encourage sediment transport, maintain trench pools, provide interstitial spaces between rocks, and scour clean gravel substrates to improve fish habitat (Figure 2). Plans are currently being made to perform maintenance to an additional 20 sills during 2016.

Over the years, these Lower Big Sandy River structures have provided habitat to support a recreational sport fishing opportunity for the public in nearly five miles of stream in a high desert environment that virtually did not exist prior to the structures. Although the lower Big Sandy River supports a trout fishery, numbers of fish are relatively low and the population is difficult to sustain through time. The trout population fluctuates and is influenced heavily by good and bad water years, and is easily exploited by overfishing due to the habitat limitations. Anglers are encouraged to practice catch and release fishing in order to promote and maintain this fishery and angling opportunity.



Office managers Sheila Watts (right) and Regina Dickson (left) pose in one of the regional boats. The ladies process between \$1200 and \$1500 a week on boat registrations and approximately 15 NEW boats a week. Probably about the same for renewals. It's going to pick up considerably in the next couple of weeks and will remain steady through August.

<http://wgfd.wyo.gov>

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~Critter Spotlight~

Swift fox

By Mark Zornes a.k.a. Leopold



- ***This species inhabits pure grasslands and shrub-grassland communities.*** In Wyoming, the species is most numerous in the great plains portion of eastern Wyoming, but appears to be expanding its range in Wyoming. Here in southwestern Wyoming, we have recent confirmed sightings of swift fox near Wamsutter, Farson, and in the grassland-juniper habitats north of Carter.
- ***There is no open season for this species in Wyoming.*** Predator control efforts during the first half of the 20th century caused dramatic declines on this once abundant canine, but numbers have since rebounded in some portions of its range. Wyoming provided numerous swift fox to the province of Alberta during the 1980s and 1990s for their successful reintroduction program, one of which north-eastern Montana has also benefited.
- ***Like most canids,*** swift fox feed on a wide variety of foods, ranging from small mammals to fruits and insects. They provide exceptional small mammal control and are a beneficial species. They occasionally fall prey to larger canids, such as coyotes and red fox.
- ***Swift fox are very closely related*** to the even smaller kit fox of the southwest. Mammalogists are still undecided as to the status of these two foxes as separate species; they may be the same, but different subspecies since some differences do occur.
- ***Swift fox have an annual litter of four to five pups*** that are born typically in Wyoming during late April or during May.